

4VAC15-50-11

Game: Bear: Open Season; Generally.

Summary:

The proposal is to add two weeks of general firearms season in 35 counties in southern and eastern Virginia and remove the 3-day early firearms season from 26 counties in northern and western Virginia.

Proposed language of amendment:

4VAC15-50-11. Open Season; Generally.

A. It shall be lawful to hunt bears in the following localities, including the cities and towns therein, during the following seasons:

Location	Season
Accomack County	Closed
Albemarle County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Alleghany County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Amelia County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following; through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Amherst County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Appomattox County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following; through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Arlington County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Augusta County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Bath County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Bedford County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Bland County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Botetourt County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.

Brunswick County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following, <u>through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.</u>
Buchanan County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Buckingham County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following, <u>through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.</u>
Campbell County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following, <u>through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.</u>
Caroline County	Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Carroll County	Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Charles City County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following, <u>through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.</u>
Charlotte County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following, <u>through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.</u>
Chesapeake (City of)	October 1 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Chesterfield County	Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Clarke County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t <u>The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.</u>
Craig County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Culpeper County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t <u>The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.</u>
Cumberland County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following, <u>through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.</u>

Dickenson County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Dinwiddie County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following, through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Essex County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following, through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Fairfax County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Fauquier County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Floyd County	Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Fluvanna County	Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Franklin County	Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Frederick County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Giles County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Gloucester County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following, through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Goochland County	Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Grayson County	Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.

Greene County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Greenville County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Halifax County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Hanover County	Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Henrico County	Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Henry County	Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Highland County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Isle of Wight County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
James City County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
King and Queen County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
King George County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
King William County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Lancaster County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Lee County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.

Loudoun County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Louisa County	Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Lunenburg County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Madison County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Mathews County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Mecklenburg County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Middlesex County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Montgomery County (southeast of I-81)	Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Montgomery County (northwest of I-81)	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Nelson County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
New Kent County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Northampton County	Closed
Northumberland County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Nottoway County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Orange County	Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.

Page County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Patrick County	Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Pittsylvania County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Powhatan County	Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Prince Edward County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Prince George County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Prince William County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Pulaski County (southeast of I-81)	Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Pulaski County (northwest of I-81)	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Rappahannock County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Richmond County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Roanoke County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Rockbridge County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.

Rockingham County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Russell County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Scott County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Shenandoah County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Smyth County (southeast of I-81)	Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Smyth County (northwest of I-81)	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Southampton County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Spotsylvania County	Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Stafford County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and t The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Suffolk (City of)	October 1 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Surry County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Sussex County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following- through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Tazewell County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.

Virginia Beach (City of)	October 1 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Warren County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Washington County (southeast of I-81)	Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Washington County (northwest of I-81)	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Westmoreland County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following; through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Wise County	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Wythe County (southeast of I-81)	Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
Wythe County (northwest of I-81)	Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.
York County	Monday nearest December 2 and for 19 days following; through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.

B. Notwithstanding provisions of subsection A of this section, bears may be hunted from the first Saturday in October through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive, within the incorporated limits of any town or city that allows bear hunting.

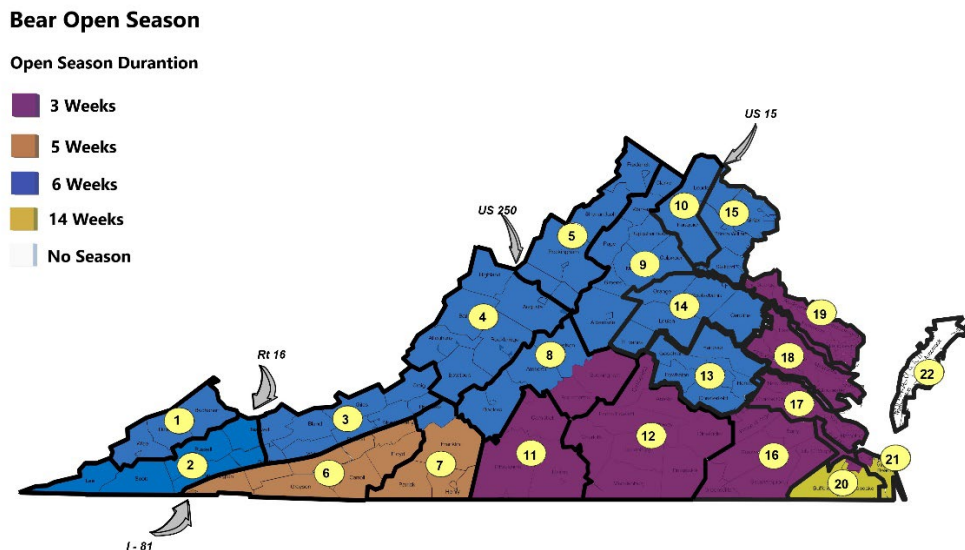
Rationale:

This proposal is designed to address both recent and longer-term black bear population trends to achieve objectives in the Black Bear Management Plan, which is under revision. Besides certain counties in southwestern Virginia, where the draft population objective is to slightly reduce bear populations, draft objectives for the rest of Virginia are to stabilize the bear population at 2020 levels. Increasing black bear populations in several southern and eastern management zones supports stepwise approaches to increase bear harvest in order to stabilize bear populations. In contrast, recent and ongoing bear population declines observed in several western and northern

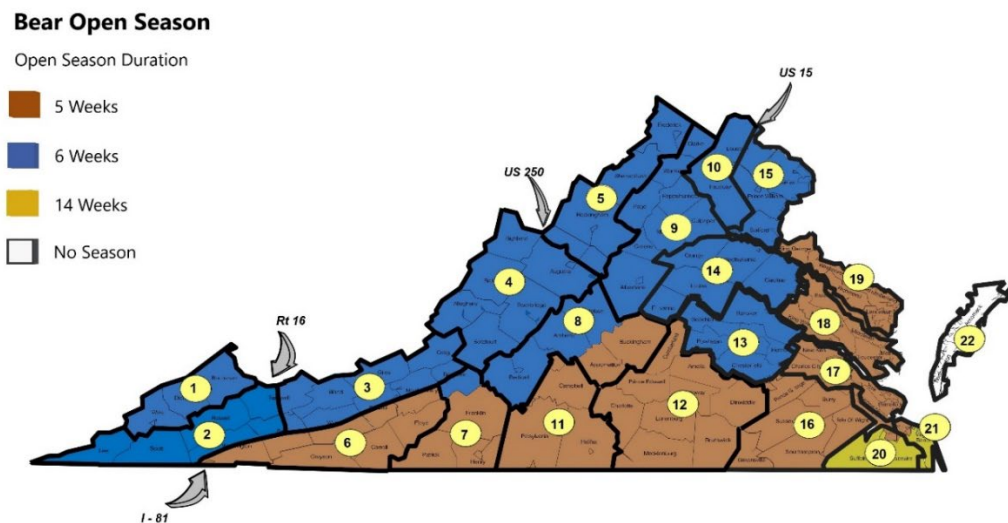
management zones necessitate reductions in harvest. Specific changes are recommended in both the general firearms seasons (November and December) and early 3-day firearms seasons (September).

General firearms bear season

This proposal would change the general firearms bear seasons from those depicted on this map:



To the general firearms bear seasons depicted on the following map:

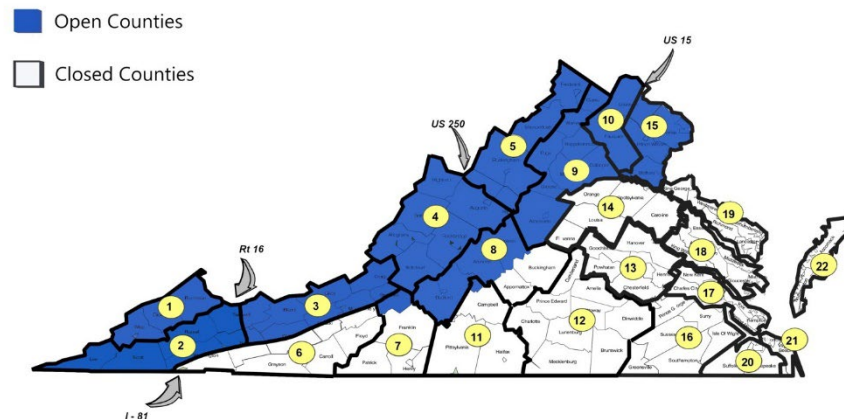


Two additional weeks of general bear firearms season are proposed for Zones 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, and part of Zone 8 (Appomattox and Buckingham counties; see map above) to increase harvests and begin stabilizing bear populations. Bear populations across much of this area have demonstrated the greatest growth rate in the state over the last decade. Adding hunting opportunity at the end of the general firearms seasons will provide additional recreational opportunities for all types of hunters using different weapons and hunting methods.

3-day early bear firearms season

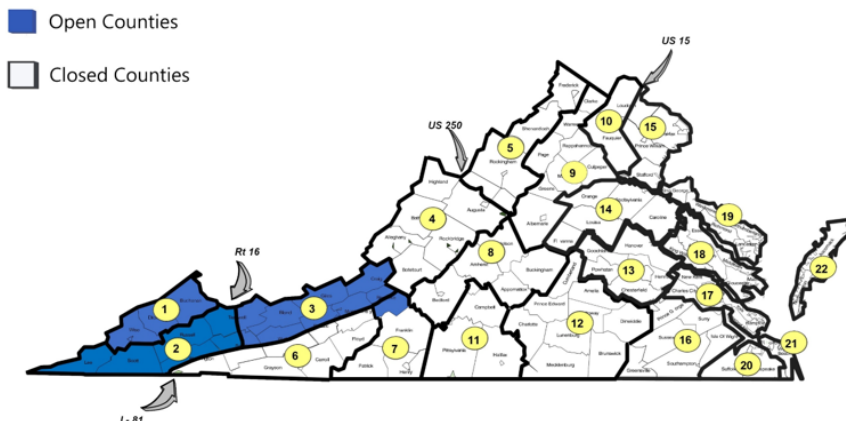
This proposal would change the 3-day early firearms bear seasons from those depicted on this map:

3 Day Early Firearms Season



To the 3-day early firearms bear seasons depicted on the following map:

3 Day Early Firearms Season



This proposal would remove the 3-day early firearms bear season in Zones 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, and 15. This 3-day season was established in 2017 to reduce bear populations in western and northern zones according to interim bear population objectives (2017-2021). The intent has been to remove this early season once objectives were accomplished, as they have been over much of this area.

Harvest data and other information (conflict reports, constituent observations) suggest that bear populations in Zones 5, 9, and 10 have declined significantly in recent years. Previous objectives to reduce the bear population in these three zones have clearly been met and current populations are below the new draft objectives, which are to stabilize bear population at 2020 levels in these areas. In Zone 15, bear harvests during the 3-day season have been inconsequential, so it is recommended that the season be removed in this zone for geographic consistency in regulations.

The magnitude of population declines in Zones 5, 9, and 10 could be partially related to sarcoptic mange, a skin disease in bears. There is currently no evidence, in Virginia or elsewhere, that the disease limits bear populations over the long term; however, other states have observed cyclic outbreaks of mange that can impact bear populations locally for several years. The Department takes the problem of mange and its potential implications on black bears seriously as it continues to gather reports, conduct investigations, and collaborate with other states to determine long-term solutions and potential impacts on bear populations.

The proposal to remove the 3-day early firearms bear season in Zones 4 and 8 is made for two primary reasons. First, recent trends in harvest and other information (conflict reports, constituent observations) suggest that we have tentatively met previous objectives to reduce bear populations over much of this area. In addition, sarcoptic mange may already be playing some role as an additive bear mortality factor in certain parts of these zones. As mange continues to spread southward and eastward in Virginia, removing the 3-day early season in Zones 4 and 8 is a proactive measure to address potential population impacts over the next several years. With both factors in mind, the proposal will ease harvest pressure to ensure the bear population does not decline inordinately below the draft objectives, which are to stabilize bear population at 2020 levels in these areas.